



Ben Evans, *Torus Taurus*, 2007

house, or artist studio above. Climbing up into the space, the plain, plywood and white interior is stark in contrast with the crazy world outside. The wooden inhabitant, perhaps frustrated with the state both outside and inside, rhythmically bangs his head against the wall. An appropriate summation of this piece.

—Joanna Szupinska

#### “OFF HOURS”

New Wight Gallery,  
Broad Art Center, UCLA

MOST OF THE ARTISTS that serve as Person Fridays to the faculty at UCLA could easily be tenured faculty in other schools' art departments. The most recent UCLA Biennial Staff Art Show really drives home this fact. Beautifully mounted in the newest New Wight Gallery (not so new in its third incarnation), the exhibition really showcases the artists' works. Steven Simon's large majestic works *Growth* (a peace sign subtly emerging out of bunches of Queen Palm twigs) and *Single* (an absurdly perfectly round and straight tree trunk) finally get their due presentation. His *Asterisk* (wood coffins representing the day's dead being cut off blanks each day of the war) is all the more

disconcerting as a pristine display. Julie Orser's wall of multicolored videotape boxes *Not Yet Tomorrow* (*Video Wall*) (companion to her video) reads ironically as both elegant reductive formalism and as a decorator's dream room divider. Ed Beller's black tape pieces, e.g., *Exploding the Formal Frame* (a large cartoon KABOOM) or *The Gordian Knot of Entanglement and How to Untie It* (hint: use scissors) are smart Old-World humor, as is his painted and unpainted matching couches *Fleshy/Formal Join*. Chris Bassett does some

classic funny Conceptual Art in his *MCS Ecstatic Energy Production, 1966-1972 (incomplete)*. Garrett Hayes shows he knows how to paint (albeit with ink), Jared Pankin skillfully arranges wood pseudo-randomly in his *Chateau Le Bergensteinerbrenner*, and Matt Lipps invokes the ghost of late UCLA professor Robert Heineken.

The show's visual centerpiece is Ben Evans' *Torus Taurus*. The title's pun only scratches the surface of all the metaphoric layers jam-packed into this

piece. It's a 3D projection of the bull in the constellation Taurus with proportionally sized ball bearings representing the stars embedded in the body. Each quarter of an inch represents one light year, so you can stand about 14" in front of the body and see the constellation pretty much as we do from Earth. (See Evans' father's site <http://phillevans.com> for pictures of how Ben did this.) However, this is no mere science demo. The sculpture is also a torus, a topological surface the same shape as a



Song Kun, *05-08-31, 2006*

(possibly misshapen) donut. To remind us of the sculpture's torus structure, Evans has given the bull an especially large bum-hole reminiscent of a donut, which he's purposely shaped like a black hole. However, he doesn't make the torus' hole go through to the bull's mouth, as an anatomist might expect, but to the bull's right eye. When you look directly down this hole, the black hole structure looks like a dartboard ("bull's eye," get it?). The bull's body isn't realistically proportioned, either. Evan studied early cave paintings so he could make *Taurus* in a style reminiscent of ancient cave-dwellers, for whom the sky was the best light show.

—Kathryn Hargreaves

SONG KUN  
Hammer Museum

ONCE UPON A TIME in the late 1990s, Gerhard Richter was arguably the coolest thing going and Luc Tuymans was not far behind. The ancient medium of painting had finally embraced photography as a subject matter, beyond the revenge-of-the-nerds kitsch of Photorealism, and the results were exciting. Each artist managed to bring together conceptual rigor, painterly pleasure, and serious engagement with the photographic convention. Those two artists were so influential, however, that an inevitable onslaught of second-rate practitioners flooded the market with imitative product. Young artists quickly figured out that with access to an opaque projector, some snapshots of anything, and some good brushes, they could easily make something that at least looked like "Art." As a result, that idiom became so tired so quickly that it was soon compared to monochromatic painting of the 1970s. The death nail came in 2004 when Pulitzer-winning über-critic Jerry Saltz, then writing for the *Village Voice*, called for a moratorium on that kind of photo-based painting.

So it was with great surprise that I found myself blown away by a recent show of snapshot-based paintings by Beijing-based artist Song Kun at the Hammer. Just when the whole path appeared to be a cul-de-sac of mediocrity, a 30-year-old woman from Inner Mongolia breathes new life into a tired practice. Globalism can have its upside. The show was an installation of dozens of small paintings hung high in a grid arrangement around the small downstairs project room. The subject matter was as varied and nonsequitur as one's daily experiences. The artist apparently made one small painting a

day for a year and titled the project "It's My Life." Sounds gimmicky, but instead I found it to be a fresh and an astounding display of painterly versatility and pictorial invention.

One of the telltale symptoms of the past decades' deluge of facile, photo-based paintings is that the work looks much better in reproduction than in person. This may have something to do with the camera recognizing its own reflection, like Narcissus in the pond, emphasizing its own strengths and glossing over the thin paint and fake drawing that the pictures are actually made of. In contrast, Kun's paintings, like almost all of the great oil paintings of the last 500 years, look better in person. I picked up the brochure for the show